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NEWS

Sen. Jason Lewis reveals legislative survey results during virtual town hall

DANIELLE KRANTZ | CORRESPONDENT

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Sen. Jason Lewis, right, speaks to colleagues about tobacco legislation. Lewis recently held a virtual town hall meeting to discuss a survey asking constituents in his district what their legislative priorities are. COURTESY PHOTO/OFFICE OF SEN. JASON LEWIS

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Residents of the 5th Middlesex District are concerned about gov
transparency, health care costs, the environment, mental health

treatment, housing affordability and state education aid, according to a new survey.

Some 1,644 people from the district — which includes Winchester, Malden, Melrose, Reading, Wakefield and Stoneham — responded to a survey conducted by state Sen. Jason Lewis, who lives in Winchester. The survey asked them to rank issues based on importance on a scale from one to 10.

Lewis, a Democrat, held a virtual town hall meeting Feb. 18 to discuss the survey results with constituents.

The top six issues constituents are concerned about are: improving state government transparency, responsiveness, and accountability; reducing health care costs and wait times for treatment; protecting the environment; improving mental health treatment; reducing the cost of housing; and increasing state aid for public schools.

“As a reminder of what our goals are in doing the survey, we obviously want to gather input and feedback from constituents and that helps us, especially at the beginning of a new legislative session,” Lewis said.

People 17 and younger said their top priority is reducing the cost of college and lowering student debt. The top concern for people 18 to 34 is reducing the cost of renting and owning housing. For people 35 to 64, it is improving infrastructure. The main priority for people 65 and older is improving state government transparency and responsiveness.

Lewis said the Senate began updating its rules in order to bring more transparency. He said a new rule will make all Senate votes available online. He also said all bill summaries will be available online and notice about public hearings will increase.

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“I believe in making government transparent,” Lewis said. “I believe that that's critical to people's understanding and trust in government.”

The survey was conducted in December and January using a Google form. It was publicized through social media, local media outlets, community organizations, high schools and email.

The town hall was hosted on YouTube, with 42 attendees who could ask questions via chat.

Lewis conducted a similar survey in 2023 and said its results contributed to his support of several bills that passed, including new laws that require 1% of the state budget to be spent on environmental initiatives, provide more funding for youth violence prevention, restrict firearms possession on school buses and government buildings, cap co-pays for prescription drugs, and expand access to maternal health.

“I heard you loud and clear. I know these were also issues that my colleagues in the Legislature heard from their constituents,” Lewis said.

Voters question Lewis

After discussing the results of the survey, Lewis answered questions from constituents who asked them in the forum’s chat.

Browyn Della-Volpe wrote, “Please have a Town Hall session in person/hybrid to address the ongoing coup and to inform us what you have been doing about it, and how we can better focus our energies on resisting.”

Lewis reaffirmed Massachusetts leaders’ commitment to standing against the Trump administration’s policies with which they disagree. H lawsuit that Attorney General Andrea Campbell and 21 other attorneys

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general filed against the National Institutes of Health, the Trump administration and the Department of Health and Human Services over an executive order lowering a cap on overhead costs associated with NIH grants.

He said the state would continue efforts to protect reproductive, LGBTQ, and other rights while acknowledging the need for a broader discussion on Trump's policies.

Lorna Garey asked, "Will you support reporting the MA Indigenous Agenda out of committee promptly and vote for its passage?"

The Massachusetts Indigenous Legislative Agenda advocates for policies that remove offensive mascots, establish Indigenous Peoples Day, implement Native history education, protect cultural heritage and support Indigenous youth.

Lewis reaffirmed his commitment.

"I've been an advocate at the local level where we've made changes in Winchester and Melrose, in Wakefield and other communities," he said. "But we still have a ways to go."

Maureen Meister asked, "Could you please take the lead in addressing and controlling teardowns? We have lost literally hundreds of houses in my town, and they were affordable."

Lewis said the housing crisis is exacerbated by the demolition of affordable homes to build larger, expensive ones. He said that solutions need to start at the local and state levels.

Della-Volpe also asked, "How do you plan to implement this publ
into an actionable plan?"

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"We've read through a lot of the open-ended comments that people shared," Lewis said. "I've been pulling together my legislation for this session. I mentioned that we just filed bills in January. I filed almost 100 bills. But not every single one of those is going to be a high priority. I will continue to share with you all, you know, our efforts."

This story is part of a partnership between the Winchester News and the Boston University Department of Journalism.

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By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester

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The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On

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Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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